

**WASHINGTON STATE
WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD
WORK READINESS CREDENTIAL PROJECT UPDATE
March 16, 2006**

High Skills, High Wages Strategy 1.3.5

Enhance “Employability Skills” Training in Workforce Development Programs

Washington State, the District of Columbia, and the states of Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island and JA Worldwide (Junior Achievement) are continuing to make progress towards launching the Work Readiness Credential (WRC). Along with the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Governors Association, the Institute for Educational Leadership, the National Retail Federation, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the above states comprise the Policy Oversight Council, guiding the WRCs development and validation.

The following brief update includes information on National and State activities since the January 2006 Board meeting, Resolution V, a Center for Workforce Preparation electronic newsletter, and the Certificate of Incorporation for the National Work Readiness Council.

National Governance

State partners and JA Worldwide (Junior Achievement) have agreed upon a number of elements that form a structure for national governance of the WRC. At the January 18, 2006, meeting of the national Policy Oversight Committee (POC), partners agreed to a number of governance elements that include (Attachment A):

1. Incorporate as a nonprofit organization titled the National Work Readiness Council.
2. File for 501(c)3 status for the National Work Readiness Council following incorporation.
3. Create an interim leadership structure comprised of POC members to make recommendations and decisions until the new Board is in place.
4. The role of the development partners in governance of the 501(c)3 organization will include:
 - Participation on a Partnership Advisory Council that provides advice to the Board of Directors.
 - Maintain at least one seat on the Board of Directors to represent the collective views of the Partnership Advisory Council.
 - Participate as members of Board committees where appropriate.

The National Work Readiness Council

The National Work Readiness Council, as established under the articles of incorporation in the District of Columbia, will be responsible for national oversight of the WRC. The recognized role of the Council will be to:

- Support the goals of the founding state and federal development partners by enhancing and promoting the work readiness of the nation's diverse population.
- Develop and disseminate tools, implement strategies, and evaluate efforts to enhance the work readiness skills of the nation's jobseekers.
- Improve access for business to a more skilled and flexible workforce.¹

A Request for Proposal (RFP) for National Vendor Services (Attachment B) was issued on February 15, 2006. This RFP outlines technical site requirements. It is anticipated the national vendor contract will be awarded by June 2006. System testing will be necessary to ensure a flawless implementation of the web-based WRC system. It is estimated that the WRC will be operational no later than fall 2006.

Pricing

Pricing is currently under discussion by the POC. To date, a specific pricing structure has not been determined and will require input from the assessment vendor being selected for nation wide administration of the WRC. The POC has, however, agreed to a set of pricing principles that are outlined below.

- **Affordability**—Price should not be a barrier to use for any of the categories of users.
- **Accessibility**—Opportunities to take the tests and earn the WRC should be available through a wide variety of public and private organizations in order to assure that such opportunities are available to the broadest spectrum of potential test takers.
- **Flexibility**—The WRC can be purchased and delivered in a variety of ways to accommodate optimal accessibility.
- **Sustainability**—Sufficient revenue should be generated to support governance, management, marketing, evaluation, and continuous improvement (updating) of the WRC.
- **Competitive**—Pricing for the WRC should be aligned with the cost of other assessments currently marketed to similar populations and intended to serve related purposes (e.g., the GED and WorkKeys).

A number of pricing strategies are under consideration, including volume pricing and licensing agreements. Developing partners, including Washington, will receive a discount on the pricing structure for the WRC.

Washington State Feedback

The approach taken by Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) staff over the last year has been to support a number of field tests, as well as visit with a wide variety of constituents who have expressed interest in the WRC. Articles on the WRC in the Workforce Board newsletter generated many requests for more information and invitations to give presentations at conferences and councils such as the Workforce Education Council, Washington Association of Occupational Educators, Career and Technical Education (CTE) faculty, and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Program Managers. Business leaders, and administrators from a variety of state agencies, organized labor, and leaders from the public education system have been engaged in a discussion on how the WRC can benefit participants in

¹ National Work Readiness Credential Delivery Partner RFP, February 15, 2006

a wide array of workforce preparation programs. In addition, many interested parties have had a chance to see the assessment during the field tests conducted in the fall 2005 and winter 2006. Observation of the test helped those interested to ‘get their arms around’ the actual tool, thus stimulating ideas for implementation.

The overarching theme from these conversations is how the WRC can add value to existing services offered throughout the state workforce development system and better serve the current and future workforce needs of business. **The WRC is seen as a voluntary tool for creating a competitive advantage for Washington’s businesses by developing an entry-level workforce that possesses the necessary skills that lead to individual success on the job.**

Work Readiness and Implementation Ideas

Community leaders from a broad cross section of business organizations, education systems, and human service provider organizations are stepping up to volunteer as pilot sites. Some of the ideas Workforce Board staff heard from interested parties were as follows:

1. Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) who made their own local investments for the development of the National WRC are: North Central WDC, Tacoma-Pierce County WDC, Snohomish County WDC, and the Southwest WDC. Although the WDCs are still thinking through the “how” for implementation in their region, there is consensus that they will, at a minimum, offer the WRC as one of the tools they have available to offer job seekers and employers. In February 2006, staff from four councils had a chance to see and experience the test at South Seattle Community College. At that time, they, along with other interested parties, had a chance to talk with the developers of the test from Stanford Research Institute. One WDC sees the WRC as a potential “fee for service” offering. Some will determine a particular focus for the WRC for the first year, such as youth, to ‘test the test’ in their community with interested employers and targeted job seekers.
2. A community that includes a WDC, School Districts, Community and Technical College, Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council, and WorkSource will have an in-depth conversation to:
 - Determine who would be the best administrator and has the most ability to meet the site requirements as well as the most experience in proctoring tests.
 - Determine who will best be able to market the WRC to employers—in some cases this could be the Chamber of Commerce, in others it may be the WorkSource.
 - Determine who would market the WRC to job seekers.
3. A WDC could implement the WRC at a WorkSource Center.
4. A cluster based approach might be taken by some, where the WRC attainment for a specific industry would be a deliverable for an industry skill panel, Center of Excellence or a Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development cluster group.
5. A targeted population such as offenders, people with disabilities, welfare recipients, or youth dropouts could be identified by a state or local agency where the WRC could be piloted specifically for that population over a designated timeframe.

Policy Implications

At this time the policy implications for the WRC are emerging. In the first few years of the WRC implementation the Board might want a venue, such as a task force, to follow and learn from those who choose to be early implementers. Once we know more about the demand, system impacts, ease of use, issues that may arise, etc. the Board will be able to determine when or if policy will be needed to guide this effort.

Next Steps

At the May Board meeting recommendations will be made to the Board if appropriate at that time. The National Work Readiness Council will be determining pricing prior to this which will be critical information needed by those communities and organizations who want to do pilots. Workforce Board staff will continue vetting implementation ideas and provide more detail at that time.

At the national level, partners states, Junior Achievement and national organization partners are also in early discussions on how they will implement the WRC. By May 2006, more information on how the WRC will be implemented across the nation will be available.